

Rosalynn Carter Childhood Home (W.H. Crawford House)
219 South Bond Street
Plains
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2203

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131-PLAIN,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROSALYNN CARTER CHILDHOOD HOME
(W.H. Crawford House)

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Location: 219 South Bond St., Plains, Sumter County, Georgia.

USGS Plains Georgia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: Zone 16, N 3546620 E 746390.

Present Owner/Occupant: Allethea Smith.

Present Use: Private residence.

Significance: Rosalynn Carter's family moved to this house in 1928 when she was 16 months old, and she spent her life here until she wed Jimmy Carter in 1946. Architecturally, this turn-of-the-century gable-front dwelling represents a modest Queen Anne influence.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1907-20.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the building stands. Deeds are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

1907 Deed February 11, 1907, recorded February 11, 1907, Deed Book 11, page 242, A.D. Wise to W.H. Crawford, one acre east of Wise Street for \$1,000.00.

1920 Deed December 3, 1920, recorded January 5, 1921. Deed Book VV, pages 40-41. W.H. Crawford to D.P. and J.W. Murray, residence lot of Crawford.

1928 Deed not located, John William Murray, Allethea Murray Smith's father, gave the house to his daughter and her husband, Edgar Smith.¹
3. Original plans and construction: None have been located.

¹ Allethea Smith, 1989 interview.

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4. Alterations and additions: This house had few alterations since Rosalynn lived there. Originally a gable-front and wing plan, a porch and pantry was added to the southwest corner of the rear facade in the 1910-20s. When the Smiths moved in, they removed the doors between the pantry and the kitchen and made it into a breakfast nook. Edgar Smith designed and built the cabinets in the kitchen and replaced one window in the south facade with a small window over the kitchen sink, which he also installed. The Smiths also knocked down the front portion of the hall to expand the living room, and installed double doors to create a vestibule area in the rear portion of the main hall. A bathroom was added between the two bedrooms on the north side of the house in 1941.²

B. Historical Context: This house was constructed around the 1920s by W.H. Crawford, a blacksmith and civic leader in Plains.³ William Edgar and Allethea Murray Smith moved into this house in 1928 when Rosalynn, their first child, was 16 months old. Edgar, a mechanic, worked at a nearby garage and drove the school bus for the children of Plains. Rosalynn remembers passing the garage each day on her way to and from Plains School. At 13, Rosalynn went away to summer camp; she returned to an entirely different life, her father diagnosed as having leukemia. He died in 1941, and thereafter she took on the responsibility of helping her mother, called Miss Allie, keep house and tend the younger children. A year after Edgar Smith died, Miss Allie's mother, Rosa Wise Murray, passed away and her father, John William Murray, moved into the house, where he lived until his death in 1966.

Rosalynn remembers the town's concern for her family during these difficult times, as well as her mother's strength.⁴ Miss Allie took various jobs in the community, working for a time at the Plains School cafeteria, working out of the house as a seamstress, and serving as a clerk at the Plains Post Office. Rosalynn also helped the family financially, shampooing hair at a local beauty parlor throughout her teen years. Rosalynn was a serious student, graduating from Plains High School as valedictorian in 1947.

As a teenager, her best friend was Jimmy Carter's younger sister, Ruth, and the two spent many weekends together either at Rosalynn's "city" home in Plains or at Ruth's "country" home in Archery. Rosalynn also developed a fondness for Lillian Carter, who had nursed her father during his illness and had taken Rosalynn to the farm the night he died. Rosalynn didn't see much of Jimmy because he was at the U. S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. She does recall, however, having a crush on a picture of him in his Naval Academy

² Smith, 1989 interview.

³ Deed Book VV, pp. 40-41.

⁴ Rosalynn Carter, 1988 interview.

uniform, which hung on Ruth's wall. The two began dating while he was at the Academy and were married soon after he graduated. When Rosalynn became a navy wife at age 18 she left her home in Plains.⁵

Miss Allie still resides in the house. After retiring from her post office position, she served as a volunteer at the depot when it served as Jimmy Carter's campaign headquarters. She remains active in community and church affairs.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This turn-of-the-century vernacular dwelling was influenced by the Victorian, Queen Anne and shingle styles, having a gable front with decorative shingles and a full front porch.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This asymmetrical, one-story house features a hipped-roof with gables facing west, east, and north. A porch spans the 40'-0" front/west facade; the southernmost bay of this three-bay facade is a 16'-0" gable end projecting 7'-0". The 44'-0" south facade has three bays; the 53'-0" north facade has five bays, the westernmost two contain in the north-facing gable and the easternmost two contained in the 20'-0" x 16'-0" rear wing. The rear/east facade features an ell nestled between the 20'-0" south-facing wall of the rear wing and a 7'-0" square breakfast nook at the south end of the rear facade.
2. Foundations: Masonry piers infilled with concrete block on the east and north sides of the house. The front porch has a brick foundation.
3. Walls: The walls throughout are horizontal clapboards with the exception of the front/west gable end whose pediment is ornamented with wood sawtooth shingles. The shingles and clapboards are painted beige, although throughout Rosalynn's childhood the house was white. A seam in the clapboards on the south wall, at the juncture of the kitchen and breakfast nook, reveals where the addition begins. A single strip of wood between the third and fourth bays of the north facade delineates the north-facing gable end.

⁵ Rosalynn Carter, First Lady From Plains, 1981, p. 26.

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4. Structural system, framing: Wood frame.
5. Porches, stoops: An extended L-shaped, hipped-roof porch spans the full west facade. Spanning 38'-0" on the west, it is 13'-0" deep on the north and 6'-0" deep on the south due to the 7' projection of the gable-end. The roof surmounts a plain wide continuous frieze supported by four fluted wood posts. These posts are arranged somewhat asymmetrically, at either end of the porch and on either side of the three concrete steps that lead to the porch. The steps are flanked by a wrought-iron rail and brick wingwalls with concrete coping. Three wood steps lead to the north side of the porch for direct access to the detached garage. The steps, wingwalls, and porch floor are painted battleship gray.

The house also has an L-shaped back porch inset between the projecting breakfast nook on the south and the extending gable on the north; this porch has been enclosed. Three concrete steps lead up to the small back stoop in the second bay of the east facade.
6. Chimneys: Two interior chimneys, located on the north and south slopes of the hipped roof, serve four fireplaces. They are rectangular and brick with projecting courses around their caps.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front door located in the middle bay of the three-bay west facade is a decorative three cross-panel with one light and a rectangular transom fronted by a modern screen. A screen door in the second bay of the east facade leads to the rear porch. Four doors lead from the back of the house to the porch; formerly exterior doors, they will be addressed as interior doors.
 - b. Windows and shutters: All of the exterior glazing is six-over-six-light, double-hung wood sash with wood sills and frames; only the small four-over-four-light breakfast nook window is an exception. Storm windows have recently been added to all openings. The west/front facade has two windows, in the first and third bays; these alone feature black wood louvered shutters. The south facade has a single window in the first bay, a double window in the second, and a smaller window in the third bay over the kitchen sink. This was originally a full-sized window, but was replaced with a smaller one when Edgar Smith installed the kitchen cabinets and sink. The north facade has single windows in the first, fourth, and fifth bays, and a double window in the third bay and a smaller window in the second bay. The east facade has a double window in the third bay, a

single window in the fourth, and a smaller four-over-four-light, double-hung sash in the first bay.

8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: The steep-pitched, gable-on-hip roof features three asymmetrical cross gables and is covered with black asphalt shingles. The front porch has a hip roof; the L-shaped back porch area is covered with a shed roof.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves are boxed with metal drips. A plain, flat wood frieze accentuates the roofline throughout.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The central front door originally opened into a hallway; a living room was to the north and a spacious bedroom to the south in the projecting front gable area. This served as the master bedroom until Edgar Smith's death in 1940. The Smiths knocked down the south wall of the living room in the late 1920s, eliminating the front part of the hall and enlarging the living room. On the south side of the east wall of the dining room are double doors leading to the rest of the original hall. These interior doors create a small vestibule area; Miss Allie has lined these walls with family photographs. The rear/east wall of this vestibule was added by the Smiths to create a small storage closet at the extreme east end of the central hall. The dining room is behind the master bedroom on the south side of the house and can be entered via two doors on the north wall (one in the vestibule, the other in the living room), or from the bedroom.

The dining room and master bedroom have back-to-back fireplaces served by the south chimney. Behind the dining room is a kitchen with a small breakfast nook extending back on the south side of the east wall. Behind the living room on the north side of the house is Miss Allie's bedroom. A fireplace flanked by closets on the east wall backs up to the fireplace on the east wall of the living room. A door on the east wall of this bedroom leads to another small hallway with a door on the south wall to the back porch, and a door on the north wall to a small bathroom. A door on the east wall of this back hall leads to the back bedroom, which Miss Allie calls her "junk room." This room also has a door on the south wall leading to the porch.

2. Flooring: The floors throughout are wood tongue-and-groove boards except for the kitchen floor, which is covered with linoleum tile.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls are, for the most part, painted

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white. Miss Allie's bedroom, the junk room, and the hallway that joins them have modern wood paneling, and the west wall of the kitchen is covered with vertical beaded tongue-and-groove panels painted white. Similar panels, though horizontal, clad the breakfast-nook walls and ceiling. The small vestibule is wallpapered and has an approximately 3-1/2' high wainscoting of beaded tongue-and-groove paneling. Miss Allie said the ceilings were originally covered with the same paneling as that in the breakfast nook, but were later covered with celotex tile. The only original ceiling is over the front porch, and it is painted green. A narrow crown molding covers the junctures of the walls and ceilings throughout. Baseboards are broad and flat.

4. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Miss Allie's description, "this house is more doors than walls," is accurate. Four-panel doors join the master bedroom to the living room, the master bedroom to the dining room, the dining room to the kitchen, the dining room to the vestibule, the vestibule to Miss Allie's room, and the "junk room" to the back hall. There are six-panel doors between the dining room and the living room, and Miss Allie's room and the back hall. Two small vertical tongue-and-groove board doors lead to closets on each side of the fireplace on the west wall of Miss Allie's room. Three larger four-panel doors lead from the "junk room," back hall, and kitchen to the back porch. These were once exterior doors. A fourth two-panel four-light door leads from the small storage area (formerly the end of the hall) to the back porch. A fifth modern hollow-core flush door leads from the east wall of the porch to a small utility closet. The Smiths closed off the living room from what used to be the main hall with large, double fifteen light doors that form the west wall of the vestibule between the dining room and Miss Allie's bedroom. The east wall of this area has louvered wood doors leading to a storage area.
- b. Windows: There is a small four-light pivot window on the north wall of the breakfast nook, looking out to the porch. This was an exterior window before the porch was enclosed.

5. Decorative features and trim: Delicate wood mantels highlight the fireplaces in the master bedroom, living room, and dining room. The mantel in Miss Allie's room is more massive and has been painted brown. The others are white and inscribed.

6. Hardware: All the kitchen cabinets were designed and constructed by

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Edgar Smith and have the original metal hinges and fasteners.

7. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The house was originally heated by the four fireplaces and a stove in the kitchen. Now heated by gas, four heating units are located in front of the sealed fireplaces and two more are in the kitchen and bathroom. Window air-conditioning units have been added to the living room and Miss Allie's bedroom.
- b. Lighting: Most of the rooms, as well as the front porch have electric ceiling fixtures. In the bedrooms and kitchen, the lights are combined with ceiling fans.
- c. Plumbing: Originally the house lacked indoor plumbing; an outhouse was located on the property. The modern bathroom with sink, shower/tub, and toilet was not added until after 1941 when Miss Allie's father moved in. Before this bathroom was added, a makeshift shower was used on the porch.
- d. Stove: The kitchen originally had a wood burning stove. Miss Allie got her first electric stove for Christmas 1941. Her husband had ordered it for her, but he died before it arrived on Christmas day.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces west onto Bond Street, which is lined with similar frame houses that generally date to the turn-of-the-century or shortly thereafter. The property extending north behind the house and east about 100' to a large field, creates a rural setting.
2. Historic landscape design: Typical for small-town families, the Smith's grew vegetables and fruit trees and raised animals in the backyard. The family kept a cow and pigs in one barn located behind the house, and mules in another. Also in the yard were a chicken coop and smokehouse.
3. Outbuildings:
 - a. Garage: West of the house is a front-facing, gable-roofed, single-car garage. The frame structure is clad with clapboards similar to the house and has a plywood roof covered with black asphalt shingles.

- b. Shed: Behind the garage is a small front-facing, gable-roofed shed. Also constructed of clapboards matching the house, it has corner boards and a standing-seam metal roof with open eaves.
- c. Barn: A barn on the northeast corner of the property was used by Edgar Smith for mules and farming equipment. The barn was struck by lightning and burned down.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interviews:

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, videotaped interview by Ed Bearss, National Park Service, May 1988, Plains, Georgia.

Allethea Smith, present occupant, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, July 11, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed books, Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

Real Property Record, card 17-05-81-8, Tax Assessor's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Carter, Rosalynn, First Lady from Plains, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Barthold
Project Historian
National Park Service
Summer 1989

ADDENDUM TO
ROSALYN CARTER CHILDHOOD HOME
(W.H. CRAWFORD HOUSE)
Jimmy Carter National Historic Site
Plains Historic District
219 South Bond Street
Plains
Sumter County
Georgia

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